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by Tom Braden

THE BIRTH OF THE CIA

When and how it got the green light

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the battle when to those who must decide the issue, a compromise occurs. Why not accept the idea and bar the man who had it from having anything to do with carrying it out?

Some such trade-off—trade-offs are never explicitly stated—hit Donovan very hard on a day in January, 1953, when Allen W. Dulles became Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, an institution that had sprung largely out of Donovan's brain.

"Ah," the old soldier sighed when he heard the news, "a very good man, Allen. I chose him personally to be chief of OSS in Switzerland. But Allen is young and inexperienced. He's never had a large command. He ought to be number two."

The emissary from Dulles to whom Donovan made this observation was amused at hearing the sixty-year-old Dulles called "young and inexperienced." But when Donovan's remark was reported back to Dulles, he was understanding. "Poor Bill. He's never wanted anything so much in his life. And you know, if they'd bought Bill's idea in the first place, we'd be a lot better off than we are now."

Dulles was trying to be generous, but he was not exaggerating. Anyone who looks at the early history of the United States intelligence effort must be struck by the time wasted between Donovan and Dulles, or, to put it more precisely, between 1945, when Joseph Stalin opened his cold-war offensive in Poland, and 1950, when the Soviet Union attacked through its satellite in Korea.

During that period Russia erected its iron curtain; threatened Turkey, the Balkans, West Germany, and the Middle East; fought proposals for a United Nations army, international control of atomic energy, and the Marshall Plan; and began its enormously effective hate-America campaign in western Europe. While all this was going on, what might have been a United States counterforce languished in the hands of ineffectual men, subalterns to chieftains who